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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 26, 2001

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Virginia Coal Mine Safety Regulation Changes Effective July 18, 2001

Richmond, VA – Amendments to Virginia coal mine safety regulations governing the use of diesel powered equipment in underground coal mines and new language to replace the existing regulation governing vertical ventilation holes and mining near gas and oil wells will become effective on July 18, 2001, the Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy (DMME) announced today.

DMME is amending the rules and regulations governing the use of diesel-powered equipment in underground coal mines to ensure that coal mining is performed safely, efficiently and in a manner that most benefits the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of the Commonwealth. The proposed final amendments were recommended by the mining industry, stakeholders, and other DMME's customers.

The regulation is needed to ensure diesel equipment is safely operated and maintained and that underground miners are protected from the effects of diesel exhaust. The regulation addresses general requirements, operation and maintenance, ventilation, air quality, fire protection, and diesel fuel standards.

New language to replace the current regulation for vertical ventilation holes will govern the drilling, equipping, operating and plugging of the holes, which are used to ventilate methane gas from underground coal mines to the atmosphere. It also will govern the practice of mining near or through a vertical ventilation hole or gas well. Use of vertical ventilation holes affects the safety of underground miners through the removal of explosive methane gas from the mine atmosphere. Safety is also affected by the potential hazards associated with mining activity occurring in close proximity to the vertical

ventilation holes and gas wells. Sufficient barrier must be left around the wells to ensure that underground miners don't accidentally mine into the wells. The regulations also are necessary to protect the welfare of citizens having interests in the vicinity of a location of a vertical ventilation hole.

DMME Division of Mines representatives will review the amended regulations with mine operators and employees at affected mine sites during July and August of this year.

The amendments were published in the Virginia Register of Regulations on June 18, 2001. Copies of the regulations may be obtained from the Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy, Customer Assistance Center, P.O. Drawer 900, Big Stone Gap, VA 24219, telephone (276) 523-8233 or 8235 or requested via e-mail at DmmeInfo@dmme.virginia.gov.

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